

Title: "Are you the one who is to come?"
Luke 7:18-28

How is your Advent season going? Are you preparing yourself, your family, for the celebration of Christmas? Or is the Devil getting in your way? If you even find yourself wanting to read the Christmas stories... wanting to have time to anticipate and feel the awe and wonder of the Christmas miracle: but find that you are so busy preparing for Christmas that you find you have not enjoyed Christmas. If you have ever experienced these things, "That's the Devil." Satan wants us to be so busy that we forget the real meaning of Christmas. The Devil doesn't want us to have Jesus to have an active place in our daily life. The Devil wants us to question whether, Jesus' hears and answers our prayer. The Devil wants us to doubt our relationship with Christ. The Devil wants to keep Christ out of Christmas. Why? Because in doing so... in casting doubt about Jesus, he can then cast doubt into our lives about Jesus' promises about whether they are real, real for US.

Now Doubt can be very bad. But in all fairness, not all doubt is bad. Doubt may lead us to second thoughts about Jesus, but I want to say that not all second thoughts are bad. Second thoughts about Jesus can be good if they eventually lead us to "right thoughts" about Jesus.

An example of this is our gospel lesson from Luke 7, about John the Baptist. John is presently in prison for publicly preaching against King Herod. John hears about how Jesus is healing the sick and raising the dead and saving sinners. And in verse two, he sends people to Jesus to ask Him, "Are you the One who was to come, or should we look for someone else?" You might say "the answer" to this question is precisely what we celebrate during Advent.... that Jesus is the one who has come. We celebrate the coming of Jesus... first as a babe in Bethlehem... and we look forward to His second coming in glory on Judgment day. So John sends his people out to see Jesus and asks... "Are you the One who was to come, or should we look for someone else?" Now this was an odd question to come from John the Baptist. "John has seen Jesus in

action!" At His baptism John recognized Jesus "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! When John was yet in the womb of his mother, he recognized the savior, Jesus. He should be the last one to be asking "are you the one?" I mean "Don't you know?" "You of all people should know." "How could you be having doubts... having second thoughts about Jesus?"

Now it is important that we sympathize a bit with John. You see, for John, things haven't happened exactly the way John thought they would. He didn't think he would end up in prison all by himself. He expected Jesus to come and punish the Herods of this world. He remembered the prophecy in Isaiah 11:4 where it says that the Messiah would strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. He remembered the prophecy in Isaiah 61:2 where it says that God's anointed one would proclaim 'the day of vengeance of our God. John was expecting a "fire and brimstone" Jesus. But instead of preaching brimstone, Jesus was preaching grace. Instead of punishing sinners, He reached out to sinners. Instead of ushering in a political kingdom, Jesus preached about a heavenly kingdom. And John was confused. "Why is Jesus letting the Herods of this world get away with murder? Why is he letting an innocent man like me sit here in this prison? Why is He letting my life come to an end like this? Are you the One who was to come? are you the one, the prophets spoke of... our Savior... or should we expect someone else?"

This teaches us something about God. or more important our relationship with God. You know it's OK to ask God questions. It's OK to say, "Lord, sometimes my little heart can't understand what's in your will... my little brain cannot understand what's in your plan. So, our prayer should always include. "oh Lord Help me to understand why things are happening the way that they are." and then of course to end our prayer... "Send me the faith to accept your way." You know... when we come to Jesus in faith, He WILL answer our prayers.... maybe not in the way we expected, but He will answer. So, in fact, second thoughts are not always bad. Second thoughts about Jesus are not bad if

they lead us to right thoughts about Jesus. Second thoughts about Jesus are good if they lead us to trust and a stronger faith.

Going back to our Gospel lesson, in response to John's question: Jesus says, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor." In other words, Jesus replies to John. "If you want to know whether or not I am the long awaited Messiah, then take a look at my track record! The blind receive sight, the lame walk, leprosy cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor." Each of these things were a fulfillment of prophecy, messages from God's prophets... messages from God. So, in answer to the question "Are you the one we are waiting for, come from God?" God says "Jesus is the one you have been waiting for" "Jesus is the Messiah."

Having said that, Jesus was not "the Messiah" which John the Baptist expected. In fact, not only was he NOT the Messiah which John had expected... He was a better Messiah.... He was a better Messiah than what John the Baptist expected! He was a Messiah who not only brought freedom here on Earth, but he was a Messiah who would bring freedom for eternity, who would bring freedom from death. Because of Jesus John could meet his own death with the knowledge that God had been faithful in his promise, that a redeemer, (John's redeemer,) had finally come. So, John's second thoughts about Jesus lead him to "right thoughts" about Jesus, and he came to know an even better Messiah.

Just like John, many people today have erroneous images of Jesus, Some see him as a divine wish granter. If I'm good, Christ will help me get a good job. Christ will help me get a new Lexus. Yet this kind of image of Christ is dangerous. It is dangerous because, "what happens when our wishes DON'T get granted?" "What happens when Christ doesn't come up with a good job or a car for you?" What happens when Christ doesn't come up with the money you need. What happens when Christ doesn't give you what you want a job, healing from cancer or for a child

to be born healthy? (pause) When you think of God as a divine wish granter, and God fails to get you what you expect... you might find yourself asking the same thing that John asked. "Are you the one, or should we expect someone else?" Maybe Christ isn't the answer to my needs. and when this happens we can be tempted to doubt God. But as I said before, not all doubts are bad. Sometimes it's good for us to doubt the image we have of Christ, when the image we have of him is wrong. As we struggle through doubt, we find a God who is not a gift giver as we see fit but as a gift-giver who knows our needs better than we do. We find a God, who gives gifts, not for earthly needs, but for eternal needs. Sometimes, healthy second thoughts about Jesus, can lead us to greater trust and stronger faith.

How do you think of Jesus? Do you see a demanding and overbearing God full of thou shalt do this thou shalt NOT do that? If so, then you need to have some healthy second thoughts about that Jesus. Jesus said [Matthew 11:28-30] "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Our God is not demanding. Our God loves us and offers us peace.

Do you think of Jesus as one who is distant and unconcerned with what happens to us. If so, then you need to have some second thoughts about that Jesus. The Bible says in Matthew 28:20, "I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Do you look to God to assure you that your life will always go smoothly? If so, then you need to have some second thoughts about that Jesus. Jesus says in [John 16:33] 'in this world you WILL have trouble. But then he also says "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." Jesus doesn't promise life will be easy. Bad things will happen because this is a sinful world, But He does care what happens to you, and he hurts when you hurt... and promises that He will be there always beside you despite the suffering in your life.

John the Baptist had second thoughts about Jesus. He found that the Jesus of his preconceived notions wasn't the real Jesus. Rather the real Jesus turned out to be better than he ever imagined. Second thoughts about Jesus are good, if they lead to the right thoughts about Jesus.

If I may end up on this note: There are many people out there who have misconceptions about Jesus. There are many out there who have been caught up with the commercialism of Christmas. There are many out there who do not know the real reason for the season. They need some second thoughts about Jesus. You know Jesus Christ. God is calling you to bring those second thoughts to them. Amen